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Former CIA Man Now Devotes Full Time to Culture of Orchids

By DON CONGRAM

BRIDGEWATER — Obviously John F. Zinski of Van Derveer Rd. finds growing orchids more interesting than working for the Central Intelligence Agency. He retired from government service to devote full time to the flowers.

To hear him tell it, the most exciting part of his government career was the opportunity to travel all over the world to collect orchids. As a result, Zinski, who has been growing orchids in one way or another for 30 years, believes he has perhaps the most extensive collection of types of live orchids under one roof anywhere.

He says he has approximately 1,400 varieties and species from Central and South America, Turkey, China, Japan, Pacific islands, Australia, Africa, United States and anywhere else orchids grow naturally.

A NATIVE of East Chicago, Ind., Zinski began growing orchids there as a child. "For a long time, I was sure orchids had something to do with rich, successful people since only the well-to-do seemed to have them," he says.

His interest continued, even after he found that having orchids did not mean immediate wealth and fame, and when his family moved to California, he established an outdoor orchid collection which is still flourishing.

Zinski has been living at Rainpond Farm for about 18 months, and has been retired for four months. He found what he had long been looking for—a place with a greenhouse and other facilities—while he was assigned in New York.

"I intend to raise orchids commercially some day," Zinski said, but first I'll have to develop a really good commercial plant.

MEANWHILE, he does a lively



FROM C.I.A. TO ORCHIDS — John F. Zinski of Van Derveer Rd., Bridgewater, examines a choice blossom in his greenhouse at Rainpond Farm. Zinski recently retired from the Central Intelligence Agency to devote full time to orchid culture. (Photo by Harvey Patterson Jr.)

trade among collectors and amateur growers from all over the world because of his extensive collection of plants. He sells breeding stock and rare plants and of course belongs to several orchid societies.

Getting into the orchid business is not an overnight affair, Zinski reports. For example, it takes a year to grow a blossom from a plant started from seed. Normally, however,

orchids are propagated by division.

One of Zinski's most treasured experiences in his long association with orchids is the successful crossing of two varieties heretofore considered completely non-compatible. "This is a first, as far as I can tell," he says. "This particular cross has been tried before but without success. It is not listed in standard references."

FOR THOSE who might be

familiar with orchid lore, the cross is between *odontoglossum crispum*, a cold climate plant, and considered the most beautiful of all orchids, and *concidium splendens*, a more tropical plant. The seedlings of this cross are less than 1 inch high now, but they apparently are going to live.

Zinski has reported this success, and says "It is causing a great deal of interest all over the world." He regularly corresponds with orchid growers in many lands.

"What I am trying to do, along with some others, is to develop an orchid that can be grown outside in this part of New Jersey . . . You already have some types of orchids here, like lady slippers."

Zinski is sharing his horticultural talents with his neighbors and anyone else interested in natural beautification. For instance, he has successfully crossed two types of rhododendron, one English and one American, for "naturalization" in Bridgewater. Neighborhood children have helped distribute the plants up and down Van Derveer Rd.

ONE NEIGHBOR, Daniel Poggi, 17, a sophomore at Bridgewater-Raritan High School, has been learning the secrets of orchid culture for some time now, taking care of things when Zinski is away, and in general helping out around the place.

Another neighbor, 12-year-old Barbara Bujak has given three lectures on the growing of orchids to 4-H Club groups and plans to give more.

Zinski says the neighborhood young people have found Rain Pond Farm a fascinating place and he is teaching some the principles of landscape gardening and plant propagation.

Zinski says he hopes to encourage individuals to grow orchids in their homes since "it is really very easy, and very rewarding."